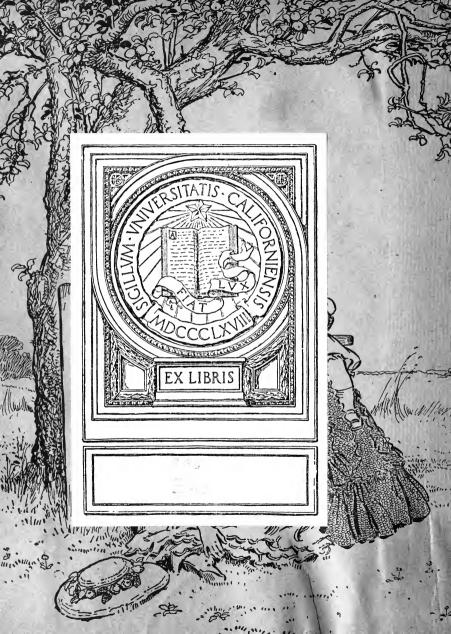
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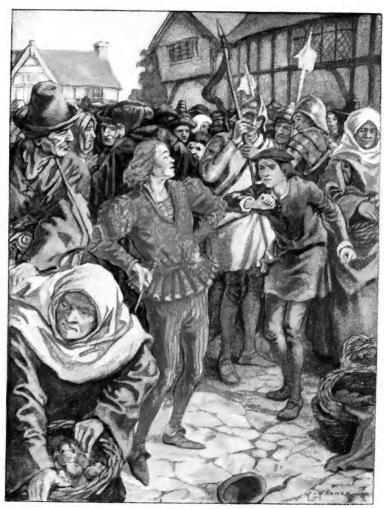
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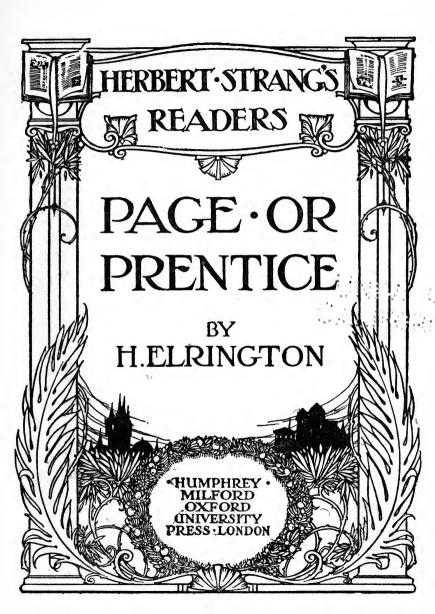




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### CHAPTER I

THE MANOR HOUSE OF DITCHLEY

One evening in the spring of 1471, a boy stood in the window of the solar or upper chamber of the Manor House of Ditchley, and looked out over the courtyard and orchard and garden to where in the distance he could see, through a gap in a hedge, a bit

of the high road to the north.

The window had once been glazed, but it had been broken in a winter storm and left unmended ever since. From it, some weeks ago, he had watched his father and brother and some score of men-at-arms ride off up that same bit of high road on their way to join Queen Margaret of Anjou, about to make a final effort to win the throne of England for her son Prince Edward. Now he looked to see the same gallant, cheery band return with news of victory.

Ralph Tankerville—that was the boy's

name—was scarcely a year old when the struggle between the rival factions of the White Rose of York and the Red Rose of Lancaster had ended, for the time being, in the defeat of the latter. Till then both parties, though fighting much with each other, had owned Henry VI. as their king. But after winning a great battle at Northampton in 1460, the Duke of York, as soon as Parliament met, placed his hand on the throne and said that his right to it was better than Henry's. Through his mother, Anne Mortimer, he was descended from Lionel, Duke of Clarence, second son of Edward III., whereas Henry VI. was descended from his third son, John of Gaunt.

It was settled that Henry should keep the crown for his life, but that Richard of York should succeed him instead of Henry's son Edward.

Now Queen Margaret was very angry at her son's being set aside in this way. Gathering an army, she won a battle at Wakefield, and in this battle the Duke of York was slain. Ralph's brother Walter his elder by five years—could remember about this victory: how his father had been sad on returning from it because there had been cruel deeds done, and how his mother had wept and said that no good could come of such deeds as the murder in cold blood of the young Earl of Rutland, the Duke of York's younger son. It seemed as though her words came true, for very soon after this the Yorkists won a great victory, and Edward, Duke of York, became King of England, though Henry VI. was still alive.

Sir Walter Tankerville, father to Walter and Ralph, though his grandfather had been a great noble, was himself but the younger son of a younger son; and as the property attached to the Manor House was but small, he had scarce wealth enough to support his

knighthood.

Three years after his wife's death he had fallen ill at Norminster, a town about twenty miles distant from his home, and had been kindly tended in the house of Giles Tylott, an illuminator and engraver of that city. Shortly afterwards he had married Tylott's sister, a gentle and beautiful woman. Tylott was a staunch Yorkist, and this marriage

may have been the reason that, though known to be a supporter of the Red Rose, Sir Walter was left undisturbed at the Manor House.

When the Wars of the Roses broke out again, Ralph, though he was too young to understand much of what was happening, knew that his father was often absent from home, and that his mother watched for his return with ever-growing anxiety. Then one sad winter she drooped and died. Both boys missed her grievously. Sir Walter, a gallant, upright knight and a good father, was able to be less and less at home, only returning in secret now and then for a few hours.

But on this last occasion he had come without disguise, with at least twenty menat-arms in his train, and with the badge of the Red Rose openly displayed; for the cause of Lancaster was uppermost again. Warwick, the great Earl, who was so powerful as to be called the King-maker, had quarrelled with the Yorkists and joined the Queen's Party, and though King Henry was too unsound in mind and body to fight

his own battles, his son Prince Edward was grown a gallant youth, and had come with his mother to claim his own.

This time when Sir Walter went away he took his son Walter with him. Ralph envied his brother greatly, and wished that he, too, was old enough to ride away in shining armour on a big horse, for it was very dull and lonely now in the Manor House, with only a couple of women servants indoors and old Rolf to watch the gate. Walter had always been ready to play with him, and he missed him sorely.

Now, as Ralph watched the high road, he caught sight of figures riding along it, and sprang down from the window seat on which he had been standing, and dashed down the narrow winding stair that led to the hall. As he did so he revealed a huge rent in the long red hosen that showed under his tunic; there were rents also in the tunic itself, and the mane of brown hair that fell nearly to his shoulders was tangled; altogether he looked as if, like the window, he stood in sore need of repairs.

He tore across the courtyard, crying,

"They come! they come! Quick, Rolf,

open the gate!"

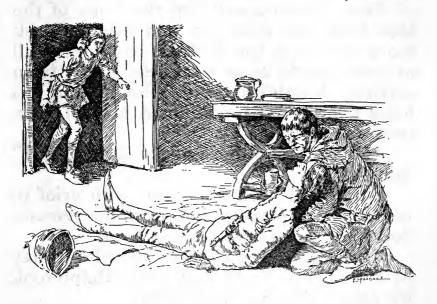
When Ralph had a mind to go down to play with the boys of the village—a cluster of huts a few hundred yards away—Rolf had a way of jingling the bunch of keys that hung at his girdle and muttering, "Ill times. Ill times." He feared to let Ralph go far out of his sight. But this evening there was no answer of any kind to Ralph's call, and he, finding the gate securely locked, fumed with impatience.

Then he remembered the postern—no doubt Rolf was gone to lock that too, though it was not yet sun-down—and he ran back through the courtyard shouting, "Rolf!

Rolf!'

#### "Walter!"

There was no one at the postern, but Ralph heard voices in the room underneath the Solar, which had doors opening both into the courtyard and into the hall. He flung the latter open, but started back in dismay, for on the floor, leaning against Rolf, who held a cup of cordial to his lips, sat his brother, but so changed from the gay handsome lad who had ridden away with his father that for a moment he hardly knew him. His face was white and drawn; there were dark hollows under his eyes; his



armour was gone, and the quilted jacket that he wore beneath it had more than one dark red stain on it.

Walter put out his hand. "I am not hurt, Ralph," he said; "only sore spent with weariness and hunger."

"And my father?" asked Ralph, with a

sort of gasp. "Is he safe, too?"

"Alas, no; he fell trying to save the Prince, and—" his voice broke, "he fell in vain."

Then Ralph knew that the hope of the Red Rose was dead too, and feared to ask more questions, for Walter's eyes were full of tears, partly from weakness, partly from sorrow. Ralph sat beside him holding his hand tightly, but too stunned himself even to weep.

"Hist! Some one knocks at the gate!"

said Rolf.

Ralph had been too dazed with grief to notice the knocking, but now he remembered the horsemen he had seen.

"I will go to the gate and see who it may be at this hour," said Rolf, while Ralph took

his place in supporting Walter.

"Ay, and see to it, grey-beard, that you admit no foe, or it may go ill with

vou!"

At the sound of the harsh voice Ralph started; he had not known that there was a stranger in the room; but now looking round, he saw a man with a bandaged head stretched on the settle at the end of it.

"Who is that?" he whispered.

"Tis my friend Sir Reynard Lane; we escaped together from Tewkesbury, where the day went against us. Have no fear, Sir Reynard," he added; "I would trust old Rolf with my life."

"I trust none of these yokels," muttered Sir Reynard; "and listen," he added angrily, "he is admitting them without our advice."

"See, Ralph," said Walter; "I am better now," and he sat up straight. "Do you run out and see who comes."

# Drievan eg CHAPTER II

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# HOMELESS

Rolf was already unlocking the gate when Ralph reached the courtyard, by which he knew there was no cause for alarm, since the warder was over careful. Also it seemed to him that there was something familiar in the appearance of the man who rode in first.

His face was a noble one, with strongly marked features; and the dignity of his bearing contrasted with the plainness of his dress, which marked him out as belonging to the trading class.

His long, full-sleeved coat, cut to a convenient shortness for riding, differed only from that of the two serving-men behind him in the fineness of its quality; but whereas they wore flat caps, he had a peaked hat with a little chain round the crown, and the rolled brim was trimmed with fur.

When he caught sight of Ralph his face lit up with a kindly smile, and then Ralph knew, though he had not seen him since he was five years old, that this was his uncle Giles Tylott. His instinct was to go forward to hold his stirrup as his father had taught him he should do, but shyness and some false pride made him hold back. This was no knight to whom the service of a page was due, but a mere tradesman; and Walter, who, though he had loved his step-mother,

had no liking for trade, had taught his young

brother to despise it.

In spite of this, Ralph felt a sudden sense of protection when his uncle, who seemed to miss no duty on his part, laid his hand on his head and said, "God bless you, poor little lad."

Ralph's lips quivered at the gentle words, and when his uncle asked, "Is Walter here?" he answered straightly, "Yes," for he knew he might trust the speaker. Then he added, with a sharp note of fear in his voice, "Is his life forfeit?"

Even if it was, it might be that his uncle,

being a Yorkist, might save him.

"Nay, Ralph," said his uncle, "his life is in no danger, though I fear he will like but

ill the news that I bring him."

Meanwhile Rolf had been showing the serving-men where to bestow the horses in the stables—empty these days of everything but Ralph's old white pony. He now bustled up, complaining that Ralph must have clean forgotten his manners to keep the worshipful Master Tylott standing in the courtyard. He had no liking for either Yorkists or traders,

but he was shrewd enough to guess that this kinsman of Ralph's might be able to help the boys in their sore need, so was bent on giving him a fitting welcome.

He led the way into the hall, which, though of good size, had a dreary, uncared-for look. Seven years before, when Giles Tylott had seen it last, a huge fire of logs had blazed on the hearth, lighting up two great carved buffets laden with silver plate; the floor had been strewn with fresh, sweet-smelling rushes; and on the table, which stood on the dais at one end of the room, a meal had been set out with dainty care and cleanliness.

Now the hearth was empty; the silver was gone from the buffets; there were no rushes on the damp flags of the floor; and though the table and two elbow-chairs still stood on the dais, the meal was spread in slovenly fashion, and there was no gentle Dame Cicely to set things right. She was gone, and so was the gallant knight her husband; and as he looked round him Giles Tylott heaved a heavy sigh.

As they entered the inner room the

strange knight sprang to his feet with an angry oath, and cried, "Betrayed!" But Walter, seeing at once who it was, muttered a somewhat surly "Good-e'en."

"Nay, sit down again, lad," for Walter had risen to his feet. "You look in some-

what evil case."

"Ay," said Walter gloomily, "all is lost and my father dead with the rest; but you have no cause to grieve, since you are for York, and Edward of York, they say, loves traders and all their wares."

His tone was almost insulting, for to his old dislike and contempt for trade was added now the bitter sense of defeat. In truth he scarce knew what he said; but the grave, dark face of Giles Tylott showed no offence as he answered patiently, "Believe me, Walter, I come not hither to-day to twit you with defeat, but to bring you tidings. I would these were better, but at least they might be worse."

Ralph had stolen to his brother's side, and Tylott glanced at the two lads as they stood thus together. They were like, yet unlike. Both were tall for their ages, and straight-limbed. The brown hair that fell on their necks was of the same shade, and both their faces to the man's keen eyes gave token of pride and a quick temper. This was much more marked in the elder of the two; while, though he was the better-featured, there was an intelligence in the dark gray eyes of the younger boy not apparent in his brother's handsome blue ones.

"Look here, Mr. Trader, for that I see is your calling," said the man with the bandaged head, rising from the settle and coming towards them, "if you mean mischief you must settle with me, and all the

power of York won't save you."

"I mean no mischief," said Giles Tylott coldly, and showing no sign of alarm at the other's threat. "I come but to tell these lads that their lives are safe—I have the King's warrant for it—but I grieve to say that this Manor of Ditchley is forfeit to the Crown, so that they are left—" He paused.

"Homeless!" the word burst from both boys in one breath; the old Manor House, small and rude as it might have looked in the eyes of a stranger, had never seemed so dear as now when it was lost to them for eyer.

"Not homeless," and now Tylott's voice was not quite so steady. "My own sons lie in the cloister of St. Mary's, Norminster, and I would fain have a nephew to take their place—such as Ralph," and he looked very kindly at the boy. "If he will obey me as a son I will be a father to him, as to my own little Cicely, the last of my children."

"A fine offer truly," muttered the strange man, "to take a knight's son and breed him up as a greasy trader!"

"Hush!" said Tylott so sharply that from very surprise the stranger was silent.

"Let the lad speak."

"Uncle," said Ralph, "I thank you, but I cannot leave Walter," and he put his arm round his brother's waist.

"There is no need, Ralph; if Walter can be content with the life in our house in Norminster, he shall be as much welcome there as though in truth he were a nephew of my own, but—" He paused as he noticed the colour rising on Walter's pale face and the sudden frown between his brows.

"But you are right in thinking I could not be content," burst forth Walter; "I am the son of a knight, and the following of



my father's father was scarcely less than that of the King-maker himself. I thank you, Master Tylott, for your offer to me, which doubtless is kindly meant, but I cannot accept it."

"Nor I either," said Ralph.

"But this is the merest folly!" exclaimed Tylott, showing some vexation for the first time. "What are you to do? You will have neither a roof to shelter you nor food to eat."

"Nay, Master Tylott," said Walter, "I refused not your offer for Ralph, but for myself only. For him there is naught else to be done; he must go with you since you offer him a shelter; besides, his mother was of your blood, so that it is less unfitting in his case than mine."

"And for you, young sir, what will you

do?" asked Tylott.

"I have taken service with Sir Reynard Lane yonder, and travel home with him to-morrow. Judge not of our fortunes by our present plight, for he has a strong castle on the east coast, where he is not only safe from Edward of York and all his crew, but may find people glad of his services."

"Let me go with you, Walter!" exclaimed

Ralph.

"No," said Sir Reynard with a harsh laugh; "I keep no nursery for youngsters

such as you, and I have no wife who might want a page to breed up. Get you gone to learn to buy and sell with your kinsfolk. But if you cannot manage your face better, you will never learn to cheat customers," for Ralph still hung back frowning and discontented. "Get you gone, I say, lest the Yorkists come and wring your neck, and—"

"And I say," said Tylott, cutting him short, "that they are more like to wring yours; the lad will be safe with me, but I know you, Sir Reynard Lane, by name and deed, and though in truth your loyalty to Lancaster has not been so steadfast as to get you into trouble on that score, there are other faults to your credit."

He spoke low, but his words stung like a lash, and Sir Reynard suddenly flung himself down again on the settle and said no more.

At this moment old Rolf came to say that supper was ready in the hall; but Sir Reynard chose to have a platter of meat and a flagon of wine where he lay, bidding Walter follow his example. "Let the two traders sup together," he said with a sneer, but not until they were well out of hearing. And Walter, who had risen and looked as if he would have liked to follow his young brother, sat down again.

#### CHAPTER III

#### NORMINSTER

GILES TYLOTT had found it necessary, before he left Ditchley, to see that Rolf and the women servants were provided for in the village, since they were not to be allowed to remain at the Manor House. Neither had he wished to hurry the parting between the brothers, so that it was nearly sunset when he and his party drew near Norminster. Ralph was riding the white pony, which, being old, had obliged them all to go at a very sober pace.

"I would fain go with you even now, Walter," said Ralph as he clung to his

brother when the moment of parting came, but Walter shook his head. "It is impossible," he said. When he saw Ralph's downcast face he added, "Who knows what may happen later? But for the present



it is better that you should be with your uncle, who is both able and willing to protect you."

Walter's pride had been up in arms at the idea of accepting any favour for himself from Tylott, but at least he had the sense to see what was best for his young brother.

Ralph's heart was very heavy and his eyes were wet as he turned in his saddle for a last look at his old home. The servants stood outside the gate to bid him farewell, the women weeping noisily and Rolf scolding them, which was his way of showing grief.

But after a time, when they had ridden away from that part of the country where everything reminded him of the home he had lost, Ralph grew more cheerful, what with the air and the exercise and the sight of many new and strange things. Also, though his uncle said but little, he was very kind, so that almost in spite of himself Ralph began to feel it a comfort to have him near.

When at last they came in sight of Norminster, he could not help giving an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, for to him, bred in a lonely part of the country, it seemed in truth a great place with its stout walls and towers, and the spire of the Minster Church soaring up into the sky.

Giles Tylott was pleased at his admiration; he loved the great free town in which he had been born and bred, and he was proud

of being one of its craftsmen.

Outside the town were the common lands to which the townsfolk had equal rights; here were fields and orchards and gardens; and in one part butts had been put up at which Ralph could see men and lads shooting with the long-bow, the general pastime when the day's work was over.

Now there was nothing that Ralph loved better than shooting at a mark, for his eye was straight and his arm strong for his age; but of late he had wearied of shooting always by himself, and old Rolf—though it was he who had taught him the use of the long-bow—was always either too busy to shoot with him, or, if he did spare time to do so, too chary of shooting his best against his young master.

Tylott noted his eager glance and said,

"Do you like shooting, Ralph?"

"Ay, rarely, Uncle, but of late I have had none to shoot with."

"Well, you are like to have enough of

it here, for King Edward values archery highly, and commands that all who can should practise it."

Ralph winced at the mention of King Edward, but all the same he was glad to

hear this.

By this time they were at the gate, which was guarded by a strong tower; and a man dressed in a quilted jacket and leather hosen, with a steel cap on his head and a halberd in his hand, greeted Giles Tylott respectfully as they rode in. He shot at the same time a curious glance at Ralph, whose clothes, though worn and frayed, yet showed by their cut that he belonged to a different class from the townsfolk.

They came into a long narrow street which his uncle told him was called the Chepe, and Ralph was greatly surprised at the number of the houses here and the manner in which they were crowded together. Some were built wholly of wood, others of plaster with a timber frame-work; and in most cases the upper storeys, which were supported on huge beams, seemed to lean forward half-way across the street. In

front of the lower part of the houses were booths where all sorts of goods were offered for sale, and over each booth swung a sign to tell the nature of the wares to be sold beneath. Ralph counted at least a dozen different ones as he went along.

A large number of people were in the street, some busy putting away their wares for the night, others hastening out to the Butts and Common, others standing in little groups talking; all of them greeted his

uncle as they rode by.

From the Chepe they came out into the Market Place, one side of which was occupied by a large building whose lower storey was formed by a long row of open arches. In front stood a huge beam and scales for weighing goods. His uncle told him this was the Gild Hall, where the different Gilds or Crafts held their meetings, and in the lower part of it the market was held on market days.

On the adjoining side of the square was the Minster of St. Mary's, a large and beautiful church with pointed windows, reminding Ralph of one in the hall at home; but the stone tracery was more richly carved. On a third side were two or three large houses, enclosed in court-yards so imposing that Ralph secretly hoped that his uncle might halt at one of them; but he rode on down another street like the Chepe but wider, and drew rein at a house at the farther end of it.

This house had a basement of stone, which raised the ground floor two or three feet above the level of the street; but all the upper part of it was built of wood, now dark with age. A narrow outside stair led to the floor above, and below this was a door leading into the cellars. On a level with the entrance a narrow alley led to the back of the house.

The house was narrow, with only one steep gable facing the street; but it was very high, Ralph thought, as he glanced up at the tiled roof. There were two storeys above the ground floor, and a tiny window in the peak of the gable showed there was something farther up still. Ralph's face flushed a little, for even without the sign, showing an ink-horn and paint-brush, which

swung over the entrance door, he could have told this was a shop, because a counter, on which books and other goods were displayed, was drawn across its unglazed

opening.

"Welcome home, Ralph!" said his uncle, dismounting and leading the way up the stair; but in spite of the kindly words Ralph's face was gloomy as he thought of how Walter would have regarded the sign. He slipped off the white pony, which the servants led away with the horses down the alley at the side of the house.

Ralph followed his uncle through the shop and up another narrow stair—inside this time—which brought them out into a room that ran the whole width of the house. Here two servants were getting supper ready. From a room at the back of this came a pleasant glow of light, and he heard

a voice exclaim joyfully:

"Cicely, your father has come!"

He drew back, half shy, half proud, but his uncle, turning, took his hand and brought him into a room, the cheerful comfort of which was a contrast to the bare flagged



"WELCOME HOME."

hall of the Manor. A tall figure stepped forward, he felt a soft kiss on his brow and a gentle voice said:

"Welcome home."

"And this is your cousin Cicely," said his uncle.

Ralph, standing shy and uncertain what to do, found a small hand thrust into his own, and a small face set in curly hair was lifted to his, plainly expecting a kiss. He pressed the little hand and smiled as he gave the kiss, but he could not speak because of something in his throat. In spite of all he had lost, in spite even of that swinging sign, the warmth of this welcome went straight to his heart.

Though it was already June, the evening was chilly, and a fire blazed on the hearth

towards which his aunt drew Ralph.

"You look tired," she said, and at the same time she cast a pitiful glance at the face that was sad and yet boyish, noting as she did so the uncared-for look of his clothes and the rents in his hosen.

Ralph as he crossed the floor felt suddenly conscious of his dusty shoes on its shining

surface, for it was all set in red and white tiles. As he stood silently warming himself at the fire he glanced at the rest of the room, and his aunt and cousin.

His aunt was very fair, with soft blue eyes, and her fairness was enhanced by the gown of dark-blue stuff she wore. This was long and very plain in cut as became a burgher's wife, and at her girdle hung a pair of scissors and various other useful things. The wimple she had on her head and twisted in soft folds under her chin, except for the fact that it was made of the finest linen instead of coarse cloth, was just like the head-gear worn by old Ursula at the Manor, and was quite unlike the horned and peaked head-dresses worn by the wives of nobles and knights.

Cicely had blue eyes, and hair of the same golden colour as the little tress that had escaped from her mother's wimple; yet was there something in her face which reminded him not only of Giles, but of his own mother. This, even had she been less openly glad to see him, would have drawn

his heart to her at once.

The room they were in would have fitted a dozen times into the hall of the Manor House, but it had an air of comfort lacking in the latter. On the tiles in front of the fire was spread a carpet of soft stuff of many colours; the walls, instead of being rough and bare, were hung with tapestry; and the settles, as well as the elbow chairs, had soft cushions of silk and velvet on them. A spinning wheel stood in one corner of the room, and there was an embroidery frame close to the chair from which his aunt had risen.

His uncle left them together, saying briefly: "Ralph had better sleep in the guest-chamber to-night." As soon as he had warmed himself, Mistress Alison took him thither, and ringing a little hand-bell, summoned a servant, who brought a large ewer of water and a brush, that he might cleanse himself from the dust of the high road.

Now, in spite of the gap in rank which he believed separated him from his uncle, Ralph, when he looked round the chamber and saw the great bed with its ample hangings, the polished floor, and the cheerful fire which lit up the spotless cleanliness of the place, felt some shame as he thought of the bare, and by no means over-clean, room in which his uncle had had to spend the previous night.

By the time he had rid himself of dust, supper was ready, and Ralph had regained some of his self-satisfaction, since the serving maid, who must have seen people of rank pass through Norminster, called him under her breath "the little noble." She evidently saw that he was no mere burgher's son.

He got something of a shock, however, when on following his aunt to the hall he found the whole household sitting down at the same table, without so much as a salt-cellar to mark a line of distinction. His uncle sat at one end with his wife and Cicely on either side of him, and there was a vacant seat for Ralph beside the latter. Farther down sat four men, three of them young, the other verging towards middle age; these he found out later were journeymen, there being in his uncle's craft, as in the others, three grades of rank—apprentice, journeyman, master.

The three boys who sat beyond the journeymen interested Ralph most, for of late he had missed sorely the companionship of other boys. He had always been glad to play with the village boys when he got the chance, but latterly Rolf had managed to put endless obstacles in the way of his

going to the village.

The biggest of the apprentices looked about sixteen, and was growing up and out so fast that his jerkin of dark-blue cloth had some ado to meet its needs. He had a friendly, good-natured face, and Ralph liked his looks better than those of the next one, who was squat, with a black bullet head and beady eyes set deep in his fat cheeks. The third was much younger, and had nothing noticeable about him but a pair of very bright eyes. All three helped in bringing in the food before they sat down themselves.

The food, which smelt so good that it made Ralph even hungrier than he was already, was served on wooden trenchers, which had been cleansed to an extent that old Ursula would have thought quite unnecessary. Most of the drinking-cups were

wooden, but a few had silver rims, and the great candlesticks on the buffet were of the same metal.

The apprentices cast curious glances at Ralph, and his uncle and aunt now and then addressed a kindly word to him and saw to his wants.

Cicely, though she sat shyly silent all supper-time, patted his hand in a friendly way once and again, an attention which, having no sisters of his own, he did not resent as much as he might otherwise have done. Before supper was finished he was half asleep, and glad to go to bed. His last waking thought was that life at his uncle's, even though he was a trader, might be fairly pleasant after all.

# CHAPTER IV

GILES TYLOTT'S WORKSHOP

The sun was already well up in the sky before Ralph—who had been allowed to

sleep undisturbed long after the household was astir—opened his eyes.

As he lay not much more than half awake the door opened, and his aunt came in, carrying some spiced cakes on a trencher, and a cup of milk.

"We dine at eleven o'clock," she said, after she had inquired how he did; "but boys are hungry folk, so I have brought you

something to break your fast with."

At the same time she laid down on the bed Ralph's tunic, which had been neatly mended while he slept. Also she laid beside it a pair of long brown hosen, saying that the crimson ones he had taken off were in sore need of repair.

It was on the tip of Ralph's tongue to say that he would rather have his own hosen, even with the holes in them, than these others, which were of a dull colour and coarser stuff; but something in her face checked him, and he was glad he had held his tongue when she added, "These hosen belonged to our Christopher, and I am glad that you should wear them."

Ralph thanked her gently, and as he ate

his cakes he wondered what Christopher had been like, and wished he had been alive to play with him.

"When you are dressed you are to go to your uncle in the workshop; you will see the stair to it at the end of the passage,"

she said.

Ralph was nothing loth to obey the order, for he knew that it was in this very workshop that a wonderful book had been made, which his uncle had brought him when he came to Ditchley seven years before. The book had been full of quaint little stories about animals, which his uncle told him had been written by a poor lame Greek many hundred years before. Ralph had delighted in them, and they had indeed been the means of his learning to read quickly and well. Scarcely less precious than the fables themselves was the title-page, on which his own name was written, with a border round it done in gold and colours.

The book came to an untimely end, because Walter had one day flung it into the fire in a fit of passion. Though he was sorry almost at once, and burned his hand

badly trying to save the book, it was too late.

Ralph had long ago forgiven his brother, but he had never forgotten the book, and the thought that he was on the point of seeing something of the same kind again made him dress hastily and hurry to the workshop.

As soon as he had answered his uncle's kindly greeting, and the latter had turned aside to answer some questions put to him by one of his workmen, he glanced round him curiously. The room was of the same size as the hall beneath it, and though it was low there was plenty of light in it, for a window ran along almost the whole length of the side which overlooked the street. Dubber, the chief of the journeymen, was wont to lament this outlook, because it tempted the apprentices to idle: but it could not be altered, for it faced north, and a north light was the best to work in.

It was glazed with panes of glass clearer than any Ralph had ever seen, set in lozengeshaped leaden frames, and he noticed that the lattice opened and shut. Along the whole length of the window little tables were set, at which the boys and some of the men he had seen the night before were at work; but the whole of the farther end of the room was occupied by a larger table of very solid make, on which lay blocks of wood of all shapes and sizes, a pile of sheets of paper, and other things of which he did not know the use.

Leaning against the wall at the opposite side from the window were more blocks of wood and more paper, but what attracted him most of all was a small table standing by itself, on which were piled at least a dozen finished books in parchment covers. He longed to know if amongst them was the book of fables, for he remembered that several copies of it had been made.

As his uncle was still busy and no one spoke to him, he stole round to the side of the room where the blocks stood, some still showing only a smooth surface, but others with drawings and letters on them, and so stained with ink that it seemed they had been used more than once. On one of these he caught sight of his favourite amongst

the fables, The Monkey and the Quarrelsome Cats.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed joyfully, then grew scarlet as he remembered where he was, and found himself the centre of many pairs of curious eyes.

"What is it, Ralph?" said his uncle, but he looked pleased, not angry, when Ralph explained shyly what had attracted

him.

"The Mayor requires my presence this morning in the Council Room," he said, "but Jan Dubber here," and he nodded to the elderly journeyman, "will show you the workshop; also the other lads can tell you many things. Come here and I will name them to you. See, this is Hal, who has grown out of his clothes before his indentures," whereat the said Hal grinned in a sheepish but friendly way at Ralph. "And this is Wat, who can work right well when he chooses, and here is Job, who I think is the nearest to yourself in age."

Wat made no sign until Giles had turned away, then he put his tongue in his cheek and winked at Ralph; but Job pressed forward and took his hand, which, to say the truth, Ralph considered somewhat of a liberty. There was, however, something pleasing in the boy's bright eyes, and he said in almost a tone of awe, "Your father was a



knight, was he not?—and you come from the country and know all about riding and hawking." Ralph answered the questions in a general way by "Yes," though indeed the only hawk he remembered at the Manor had long ago dropped off his perch in the hall, and the old white pony had of late been the only occupant of the stables.

But Dubber came now and showed him many wonderful things. First, there was a man working at a coloured border like the one in his book, and next him there was another who, when he had finished putting in the colour, spread sticky stuff on certain blank spaces and over these spread gold-leaf. This leaf was so thin that Ralph wondered how any man's fingers could work it without tearing, and even be able to shape it into all kinds of patterns.

Job's business was grinding up and mixing colours, which Ralph thought must be a most delightful occupation and easy. Dubber told him it was not really easy, but little Job had been born with a wonderful eye for colour, whereas the elder boys could not be trusted at all to mix the colours rightly, even

Hal, who always did his best.

Wat was sorting sheets of paper at a small table near the big one, putting all the thick sheets in one pile and the thin in another, and separating in the same way the sheets that were discoloured or stained from those that were a pure mellow white.

Hal's work seemed the dullest of the three to Ralph, for he was only smoothing some of the blocks with a little plane; but he did it, any one might see, with great care, as if his whole mind was in his work.

On one of the blocks, which was ready for use, a young journeyman was drawing a pattern with a sharp instrument, and beside him was a man with a block on which the pattern was already drawn. His business was to cut out the spaces between the lines of the pattern until the latter stood up in relief. He had just finished, and now Dubber took the block from him.

"I will ink this," he said, "and show you the rest." Taking a brush he brushed the block over with thick sticky ink; then he placed it on the solid level table with a sheet of paper on top of it, and added, "See here, I will rub it now with this frotten," and he took up a burnisher which lay on the table. "This will serve my turn to show you; but see yonder—" and he pointed to a clumsy wooden machine that stood at the back of

the table—"that press is a better means

of getting a good impression."

Then he drew away the sheet he had printed, and Ralph saw a picture of a little house with a few words printed underneath.

He gave an exclamation of admiration.

"Ay!" said Dubber, well pleased at his interest, for he dearly loved his craft, "but I have heard tell from a man, but lately come from Bruges, that for new printing there, which differs greatly from this, they use a machine that does the work much better, the pressure being applied by means of a screw and handle. What you see there is but weak and clumsy in comparison. There are other things as well that are much better than ours for the making of books. But now I must idle no longer, and yonder lads will do their work better without having a strange lad to stare at."

Ralph took the hint, and made his way down to the lower part of the house, where

he found Cicely eagerly awaiting him.

## CHAPTER V

### THE QUARREL AT THE BUTTS

For some days after Ralph came to Norminster he saw little of his uncle, for the latter had much business to attend to as well as that connected with his craft. Norminster, like the other great free towns of England, managed its own affairs without any outside person having a word in the matter except the King himself, and as Giles Tylott was known to be as wise as he was honest, he was often needed in the Town Council.

These days passed happily enough for Ralph, who of his own free will spent much time in the workshop, where he found endless interest. Dubber encouraged him, for he found in him a pupil after his own heart. Discovering that the lad had an aptitude for drawing, he gave him a tool with a sharp point, and a block that had been rejected because there was a flaw in it, and bade him try his hand at drawing and carving.

While working with him Ralph forgot for the time being that he was the son of a knight; but he was very ready to assert himself where others were concerned, and Dickon, another of the journeymen, who was a man of crabbed temper, was wont to scowl and mutter, "Pert popinjay!" Also Wat, who being lazy and careless got blame where Ralph got praise, was openly jealous of him. Hal and Job were both friendly, and liked Ralph so well that they did not resent what Wat called his "lordly airs."

Out of the workshop he saw but little of Wat, though he found, to his surprise, that the apprentices not only had their meals and lodgings in the house, but were allowed

to enter the parlour and garden.

There was a garden at the back of the house with a row of fruit trees, dividing the upper half, where there was a grass-plat, from the lower, where there was a garden of pot-herbs. It was possible on the grass-plat to play ball and other games, and in all of these except bandy ball—which being played with iron-shod sticks was too rough for her—Ralph and Hal and Job were

nothing loth that Cicely should share. Wat

scoffed at playing with a girl.

Mistress Alison was very kind, and noted with pleasure that already Ralph was regaining the light-heartedness of his age. Every



day Ralph loved her and little Cicely better, and he liked to serve his aunt and to carry her Prayer Book to the Minster, where she went each evening before supper.

In the evenings she brought out a chessboard and taught him chess, a game he had always desired to learn; but though there was a board at the Manor House, Walter had not patience for any game that required thought. Cicely liked to look on and to hold the pieces as they were taken; and then, when she had gone to bed and Mistress Alison to her embroidery frame, he found ample entertainment in a book that lay on a table near the window. Sometimes Hal would steal in to look at it with him, but he was shy and always felt too big and awkward for the parlour.

This book puzzled Ralph greatly, for his quick eye saw that it differed in some way from the other books he had looked at, and that though the letters resembled those on the book-blocks in the workshop, yet were they not quite the same, but finer, as it were. The book had no pictures, but what he read in it pleased him very much, for it was a story of knights and their gallant

deeds.

One day he was so deep in the book that he did not know that his uncle and Master Carder, the wool merchant from the Chepe, had come into the room until his uncle said, "Ah, Ralph, the man who made that book loves knights and fine deeds rarely well; too well some folks say, who think he should spend all his energies on more serious matter." Then Ralph listened eagerly while his uncle talked to Master Carder about this very book.

"Martin, who made a journey to Bruges as soon as he was out of his indentures, bought by my order a book printed by Mr. Caxton there, according to the wonderful new method which, if I judge rightly, will largely improve and alter the making of books, especially in the matter of quickness. See here—instead of being laboriously cut on a solid block of wood, the letters for his press, made of metal, are separate, and can be shifted at will and used over and over again. Martin says, and I have no doubt he speaks truth, that William Caxton can turn out as many copies of a book in a week as I could in a whole year.

"Then, though some might think it a small matter, here is a new contrivance for inking the type which seems to me very excellent. They use it over there, though I know not who is the inventor." He took off a shelf a thing that had puzzled Ralph. It looked a little like old Ursula's rollingpin, except that it was covered with sheepskin instead of being floury. "It is made, you see," Tylott went on, "of a block of beech hollowed out and stuffed with wool, the outside being covered with untanned skin; being mounted with a handle it is convenient for use."

Then they began to talk about the wool trade, which did not interest Ralph, and he ran off to join Hal.

The next day was a holiday, and in the afternoon the boys started for the Butts. Dubber, as he closed the door of the workshop, called out that he was coming with them.

"What ails him to do that?" grumbled Wat. "Now we shall have no fun."

"Tut, Wat," replied Hal, "Dubber has as good a right to shoot as we have; besides—" and he whispered something in Wat's ear which Ralph could not hear, but he guessed it concerned himself when Wat muttered,

"Ay, I suppose Prince Prettyman must have a nursemaid to attend him." Ralph reddened angrily, and made up his mind that this malapert boy should be taught to know his place before long.

"Can you shoot?" asked Hal as they

went along.

"Ay, but I have no bow here." Ralph thought with regret of the old bow he had left standing in the corner of the hall; though the string was frayed and it was well-nigh past use, it would have been better

than nothing.

"I have money to buy you a bow by the master's orders," said Dubber, touching the gipsire that elbowed an inkhorn and a serviceable knife in the leathern girdle of his jerkin; "but yesterday I was too busy to see to it, and to-day being a holiday Mat Bowman will not be doing business, so you must e'en make shift to borrow from Hal or Job. See, there is no one in charge in the shop yonder but old Granny."

Ralph, peering eagerly at the fine stock of bows and arrows, saw there was indeed no one in charge but an aged woman, who seemed to have a grudge against some one in their party, for she shook her withered fist at them as they went by.

"It is because of Wat," whispered Job.
"He loves to tease her because he likes to
see her in a tantrum; but say naught of
what I tell you, or he might get a flogging."

"And serve him right too!" said Ralph hotly, for he had no taste for cruelty. But

he gave the desired promise.

By the time they came out on the common where the Butts were set up there was already a crowd of people there, so that Ralph, in spite of his sense of being their superior, felt shy. But the townsfolk were too much absorbed in their own pursuits to pay much heed to one strange lad, except one boy who called after him scoffingly, "Hallo, Pointed Toes!" alluding to the length of Ralph's shoes, which were at least two inches longer than his own.

Each lad had three shots at the mark in his turn, and Hal, who had the making of a fine archer, hit the second circle marked on the target with two of his arrows and the bull's-eye with the third. There was an eager clapping of hands, for all the lads liked stout Hal, who never said an unkind word or did an unkind action. Then it was Wat's turn. He had a cast in one eye, which perhaps affected his aim, for he was never so good a shot as Hal, and now his first two shots scarcely grazed the outer circle. The lads who had clapped Hal jeered at Wat, who was known to be a braggart, and was not popular.

"Tis the wind," he said, though the day was fair and still. Then getting angry he shot still worse and missed the target altogether, drawing an angry cry from the marker, who had found the arrow alight

too near him for comfort.

The boys laughed, Ralph amongst the rest.

"Do better yourself if you can," sneered Wat, who was sharp enough to note that Ralph's fingers shook as he fitted the arrow to the string.

Ralph was indeed by no means confident, for the number of spectators confused him. His first arrow flew wide, and Wat cried to the marker to look out for himself; his

second was no better, and ashamed and nervous he shot away his third hastily. But now it happened rather by luck than skill that this arrow flew straight to the mark, and lodged in the very centre of the bull'seve.

The lads set up a great cheer and Ralph smiled well pleased with himself, but Wat shouted angrily, "Out on you all for a set of lickspittles! the hit was sheer luck, for he shut his eyes. Ye think him a fine shot because of his long shoes and short tunic. Shabby little sprout of the Red Rose!" And he put out his tongue at Ralph.

As for Ralph, he dropped Job's bow, and clenching his fist struck Wat a heavy blow right in the middle of his fleshy face—a blow that sent him staggering back into the arms of the nearest boy with blood gushing

from his nostrils.

At once there was an uproar—some taking Ralph's part, some Wat's, the latter roaring all the time like a young bull. Some of the elders now ran up from the men's butts, Dickon amongst them, but not Dubber, who had been called away to speak to some



WAT IS IN TROUBLE.

one. Wat was not really much hurt, and Joan the baker's wife, who had been watching her husband shoot, now bustled up and put her house-door key down his back, with such good effect that the bleeding at his nose speedily stopped, though he roared louder at the cold touch of it than he had done at the blow itself.

Ralph stood aside, glad that Wat was not much hurt, but not at all sorry for what he had done, since the churl had got no more than he deserved for his insolence.

But Dickon was cross, and saying there should be no more shooting for the boys that day, got them out of the crowd as soon as he could and himself saw them safely home.

The next day Ralph found that Dickon and Wat had brought the tale of the fray at the Butts to his uncle's ears, and it had lost nothing in the telling. When his uncle spoke to him in a tone of grave reproof for his violent conduct, he answered impatiently that he struck the village boys when they were insolent, but they knew their place and made no stir.

"It may be that you had the power to strike the village boys," was his uncle's reply, "though I have no doubt you were in the wrong to do so; but you have neither the power nor the right to strike your fellow prentices."

"Fellow prentices!" stammered Ralph,

growing scarlet.

"Ay," said his uncle, "I intend to have you bound apprentice to my craft, and have already notified the matter to the Mayor. You will be an apprentice like Hal and Wat."

"An apprentice?" cried Ralph in a tone of disgust and dismay. "Am I to be a

common boy like the others?"

"No one need be a common boy unless he chooses," said his uncle very coldly. "Had my own sons lived they would have been bound apprentices to my trade."

"I care not! I will not be an apprentice!" said Ralph passionately. "I am the

son of a knight."

"Ay, of a knight who I have no doubt would approve my action."

But Ralph paid no heed, and Giles Tylott

went on, speaking now very sternly, "You have no choice in the matter; besides, it seems to me that you have a gift for all that concerns my craft."

Now it was true that in his heart Ralph loved all he had seen of his uncle's business, but his blood boiled at the idea of being placed on a level with Wat and the others, so instead of answering he only hung his head sulkily.

Had he taken the matter in a better spirit his uncle might have explained to him that, besides believing that he was fitted for the work by his keen cleverness, he was desirous of having him enrolled a member of his craft at once, for his own greater safety. Though the townsfolk had not meddled greatly in the struggle between York and Lancaster, there were one or two men on the Town Council who nourished a bitter hatred to the Red Rose, and Ralph's violent conduct at the Butts had drawn attention to the fact that he was the son of an adherent of it. Tylott feared that Ralph might be taken out of his hands altogether, and perhaps harshly treated, if he were not quickly established on the same footing in his household as the other boys.

His first outburst of passion over, Ralph realised that he must submit; but he did so with a bad grace, and secretly rebelled at every rule of his new position. He hated the blue jerkin and flat cap and square-toed shoes that made him look exactly the same as the others, and dearly as he was beginning to love his aunt and Cicely, he avoided the parlour and the garden.

During these days, when his pride was up in arms, he took no pains to do his work well, and Dubber was grieved at the change in him. But Dickon was pleased, for, like Wat, he felt envious of the newcomer.

One thing that Ralph disliked very much was having to take his share in waiting at table—quite forgetting that, had he been a knight's page, the same kind of work might have fallen to his lot. Also he no longer cared to go to St. Mary's Church, where he now had to stand in a side aisle, herded with the other apprentices, instead of being with his aunt in one of the pews set apart for the families of members of the Council.

At this time Giles Tylott was contemplating a serious change in his business. He had a great longing to try his hand at the new invention of printing with moveable types, but as yet he had not seen his way to do so, since the new art had not so far been introduced into England. Either he or Dubber, sometimes both of them together, had to make journeys to London and Oxford, the two places where there was the best chance of obtaining information, and Dickon, when left in charge, did not seek to make things pleasant for Ralph. He was not indeed spiteful like Wat, who once stuck out his foot that Ralph might trip over it when serving, so that he upset a saucepan of gravy over the Town Clerk; but he made life hard for him in the workshop, and sought every occasion for giving him dull and menial jobs to do. the control of the state of the control of the

# CHAPTER VI

#### FLIGHT

It was market-day in Norminster. Ralph was busy in the cellar, clearing a space for a fresh supply of paper that was expected to arrive that morning, when Job put his head in and said:

"You are to go up to the market-place, Ralph, and see if the carrier from Cran-

bourne has brought the paper."

Ralph ran off, glad enough to escape from his dull work. There had been times lately when he had been minded to escape altogether and throw himself on Sir Reynard Lane's mercy; but the white pony, which he had brought out once or twice for Cicely to have a ride on, was no longer capable of a long journey. Besides, Dickon had the key of the stable, and would ask what it was wanted for.

Though he was in no mood to make the best of things, his spirits rose in spite of himself when he saw the cheerful stir in the market-place. It was thronged with

people, and a row of country carts—mere boxes on two wheels—was drawn up opposite the Gild Hall, while their owners were busy selling all kinds of country produce.

There were heavily laden packhorses standing patiently in the middle of the square, and sturdy country wives who had ridden in with baskets of eggs and fowls swung in front of them. There was much talking and shouting, and to add to the clamour two unruly pigs which had escaped from their owner uttered frantic squeals when he endeavoured to recapture them by catching hold of a tail or a leg. Undisturbed however by all the din and turmoil, the portly, prosperous toll-collector with his leathern pouch made his way from group to group, collecting the market dues.

There were plenty of cakes and sweetmeats for sale, as well as more useful things, and there were groups of jugglers and minstrels before whom Ralph would have dearly liked to pause. But fearing to delay, he ran round the market-place in search of

the carrier from Cranbourne.

Outside the door of a tavern was a party

of men-at-arms, evidently the following of some knight or noble who had come into the town on business or to purchase stores. As Ralph elbowed his way through the crowd some one called out angrily:

"Have a care, Flat-cap!"

He found he had knocked up against a boy of his own age smartly dressed as a page, his tunic coming scarcely below his waist, it was so short, while his sleeves were so wide at the shoulders that they gave him the appearance of a top. He carried a cane in his hand, with which he struck Ralph sharply across the shoulders.

"Take that for your insolence!" cried Ralph, knocking his velvet cap into the mire.

The other turned sharply now, and Ralph saw that the lad was Gilbert Moulay, a boy for whom both Walter and he had a great contempt, partly because he was cowardly and selfish, partly because his father, whose estate was near that of Ditchley, was known to be really true neither to York nor Lancaster, but only to the winning side.

Gilbert took one long look at Ralph

and then burst into a peal of mocking laughter.

"I fight not with Flat-caps and churls!"

he said.

It is hard to say what Ralph might or might not have done in his rage and shame at this boy of all others seeing his fallen position, had not a calf which had escaped from its pen come tearing across the square, followed by a little crowd in hot pursuit. The boys were parted. At the same moment Ralph caught sight of a cart laden with what might be bales of paper just coming up the Chepe.

"Ay," said the driver when Ralph went up to him, "I am from Cranbourne near Tollerton, and I have goods for Master

Tylott."

At his words Ralph gave a great start, for Tollerton was, he knew, the nearest town to

the castle of Sir Reynard Lane.

"I should have been here three hours agone," added the man, "but my helper fell ill on the way, and I am a cripple, not able to fend for myself single-handed."

"I know of a boy would help you home,"

said Ralph as a sudden idea came into his mind. "He wants to go to Tollerton, so he

would need no wage."

"Well," said the man, "tell him then to be at Peter the Webster's in East Street off the Chepe at sunset, for I do not sleep here but at my cousin's tavern seven miles off, where I left the other lad ill."

Ralph worked so steadily, sorting and unloading, in the cellar for the rest of the morning as to win praise even from surly Dickon; but this had no power now to salve his angry spirit. He had made up his mind to get away by means of the carrier to the Castle, where he could learn to be a page. Dickon should never have the chance of flouting him again. Under the plea of feeling hot he flung his flat cap—the badge of servitude—into a corner; but he never meant to wear it more.

When supper was over that evening Cicely called to him to come and play in the garden; but he managed to slip out into the street instead, and to linger unperceived in the alley next the house until the hour the man had named. Then, carrying a

bundle, he made his way to the Chepe, and was already rejoicing at the ease of his escape when an old woman ran out of a house and, seizing him tightly by the collar, shouted loudly for the city constable. She



had a booth on market-days against St. Mary's Church, where she sold cakes, and that day a couple of idle apprentices had knocked it down, and on pretence of helping her to pick up her goods, had stolen some of her cakes and escaped scot free.

Now to her dim eyes one apprentice boy was very like another, and when she saw a boy stealing in a guilty way down the street, she made sure it was one of the culprits, and pounced on him. Though she looked frail she was in truth strong, and Ralph could not free himself without hurting her.

"Let me go, you wretched old Yorkist!" cried Ralph, forgetting caution in his rage and fear at the delay, for he knew the constable was in the market-place and might come up at any moment. He had noticed that she had a white rose, clumsily made of paper, pinned in the front of her drugget gown.

But instead of being angry at his words

her grasp relaxed.

"You hate them too," she said in a whisper; "so thief or no, you may go free. Old Molly will not seek to hurt you; for though I must get my living in a Yorkist town, I still love the Red Rose dearly."

Ralph had just time to escape before the constable came round the corner, and was soon safely concealed under the tilt of the carrier's cart. Yet though he had succeeded

in his plan, there was a little ache in his heart when he thought of Cicely calling for him in vain.

## **CHAPTER VII**

#### LANE'S CASTLE

"YONDER is Sir Reynard Lane's Castle, and here you must get down if you really want to go there, and there is a groat for your pains."

But Ralph shook his head, and bidding the carrier good-bye, ran off in the direction

pointed out.

The man looked after him curiously. "He must be silly to refuse a groat," he thought, "and to want to go to Lane's Castle. Howbeit 'tis no affair of mine." And he drove on.

The Castle, which was surrounded by a high wall, stood up grim and forbidding in front of Ralph. Something in its aspect

made his heart sink, though he did not yet regret the hasty impulse which had made him seize the opportunity to get away from Norminster.

Making his way into the shade of a clump of trees, he opened his bundle, and took out of it the clothes he had worn at Ditchley. Then he approached the Castle. Apparently he had been seen coming, for a man dressed in a greasy tunic opened the gate and asked roughly, "Who are you?"

"I am Ralph Tankerville, and I seek service with Sir Reynard Lane." Ralph tried

to speak boldly, but his voice quavered.

Two men as ill-looking as the first now came forward, and Ralph might have thought that he had mistaken the place, were it not that he saw Sir Reynard's badge—a fox—on their shoulders.

"Follow me, young sir," said one of them; and Ralph thought, "At least they know I am no churl."

He followed the man across the courtyard and up a winding stair, to a gloomy hall dimly lit by the evening light and a smouldering fire. The thought that he was escaping to live at a place where he would learn to grow up into such a gallant knight as his father had been, had mingled with more foolish thoughts when he ran away from Norminster. But now as he gazed on the squalid scene before him, his heart and his hopes failed, and the very atmosphere of the place made him feel sick.

The floor was strewn with rushes that had not been changed for days, amongst which two or three dogs routed for bones that had lain there for a fortnight. Mingled with the evil smell of the rushes was that of stale beer and wine that had been spilt on floor and table. There was food enough on the table, and various flagons of wine and a huge salt-cellar to mark the barrier of rank; vet there seemed little to choose in looks between the three men who sat at the upper end and the group who quarrelled at the lower. Sir Reynard's face, no longer concealed by a bandage, was as ruffianly as that of his men, and the squire who sat beside him was no better. The third person, Walter Tankerville, lifted his flushed face with what could scarcely be called a look of greeting to his brother; he had a weary, hang-dog air, such as Ralph had never seen on him before.

"So you have come, youngster, in spite of my warning," said Sir Reynard with a great laugh. "Well, since you have come we must e'en make a man of you. Eh, Kester?" and he turned to his squire. "Here, one of you fellows, give him some food."

He took no further notice of Ralph, and presently left the room, taking a flagon with him and bidding Walter follow him. When Ralph had eaten his supper one of the men, pulling out a truss of straw, told the boy he could lie upon that in a corner of the hall.

Ralph awoke from an uneasy sleep to find his brother sitting beside him. Now there was welcome in Walter's eyes, but he put his fingers to his lips, and glanced round the hall in a way that made Ralph understand that he must tell his tale in a whisper.

"Would that you had stayed in Norminster in spite of all," he said, "for though I am fain to have you with me, this is an evil place, full of evil men."

"But, Walter, you would not wish me to be an apprentice? I want to grow to be a

knight as my father was."

"And that you will never do here!" said Walter bitterly. "Sir Reynard proves to be no better than a common robber and murderer, and I have seen things done here, aye and helped in them too, that sicken my soul to think of."

"Why, then, we must e'en go away."

"Nay, that is not so easy as it is to come here. He would kill me if we failed, because I know his evil secrets. I must go," he added, as the men showed signs of stirring, "and for the present all you can do is to obey Sir Reynard, and take little notice of me."

"But, Walter—if he orders me to do something base?"

Walter's only answer was a miserable

look, and then he stole away quietly.

Ralph was greatly troubled. As he sniffed the heavy air and thought of the cleanly comfort of his uncle's house, he sighed, though even yet he would not allow that he had done foolishly.

But as the days went by—child though he was—he saw that he and Walter had made a grievous mistake. The knight's service he had dreamed of was not to be found in Lane's Castle. Life in it was not only squalid, but very dull—duller even than it had been in the last months at the Manor House. The courtyard was big, but he grew quickly tired of it when he found that it was not an easy matter to get outside it. The surly porter at the gate kept such a watch that there was no passing him, and he swore and threatened if Ralph tried to persuade him to let him out.

As the long weary days went by with nothing to do but to loll on a settle in the hall, or wander aimlessly round the court-yard, he longed more and more for the full and varied life of which he had had a glimpse in his uncle's home. The grievances on which his mind had dwelt began to shrink in size, and even Wat at his worst was better company than Jan the porter.

He missed the music in the Minster

Church where, before he let his temper get the mastery of him, he had felt peace of mind as he knelt with his aunt and Cicely. Then he missed the companionship of the other boys; he wished for the Butts and the free outdoor life of the Common; and longed for the pleasant garden, and little Cicely running up to ask him to play ball with her. But almost more than all, as he sat idle and listless, he missed the workshop where he had seen a new world of art and learning opening before his eyes, a world in which he himself, he now too late realised, wanted to be up and doing. In his own mind, too, he could not avoid comparing his uncle and Sir Reynard, and was fain to confess that it was not the trader but the knight who was the churl.

One day, when a pedlar called and was allowed to exhibit his wares in the hall, Sir Reynard bade Ralph choose a fine new tunic for himself and a pair of scarlet hosen. But Ralph, though he dared not refuse the gift, could take no pleasure in it because of

his distrust of the giver.

The day after this Sir Reynard bade

Ralph put on his new clothes and go out with Kester and the other men. "Tis time for you to see something of life," he said. And Ralph was glad enough to go, for he was very tired of life in the Castle. They rode for some miles until they arrived at a bridge over a river. Crossing this they came out on the high road to the east.

They passed two parties of travellers, all well armed and mounted, and Ralph noticed that Kester swore at these when they were out of hearing, though they had molested him in no way. After what appeared to be an aimless ride, Kester returned to the Castle, in a very bad temper. Ralph would have liked to ask Walter the meaning of this, but he never now got the chance of speaking to him alone.

A few days afterwards Ralph, peering about the courtyard at the rear of the Castle in search of some means of amusement, made a discovery. He saw a hole rather high up in the stone-work of the wall, and putting his hand into it found a key. Now Jan always brought the keys of the Castle to Sir Reynard at night, but Ralph, being keen-

witted, made a good guess at the truth, which was that Kester, who had a mind sometimes to go to and fro without his master's knowledge, possessed a second key of the postern.

Ralph tried the key, and found it turned easily, though he did not venture to open the door. He put the key hurriedly back in its place; here he felt was a possible means of escape, if he could only get Walter to come with him.

# CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAVELLERS FROM BRUGES

Nor long after the finding of the key, Ralph was told again to ride out with Kester. He hoped that this time they might go in the direction of the town of Tollerton, as the other road had been dull enough. But once more Kester turned towards the river and crossed the bridge. After they had gone some distance beyond, they saw two travellers with heavily laden packhorses coming towards them. The elder of these men, though travelstained, had the air of a well-to-do merchant, and the other looked like his servant.

Now, with the decay of chivalry and the civil discords of the Wars of the Roses, there had arisen certain evil knights, who, sheltering themselves under the wing of some powerful noble who tolerated their doings for the sake of their services in war, were in the habit of robbing and even murdering those who were not strong enough to resist them. In lonely parts of the country they made travelling dangerous except for those who went in large parties and well protected.

To this class Sir Reynard belonged. More cunning than most, he had even now devised the plan of using an innocent boy to allay suspicion.

Ralph was too young to understand much of all this, but he was naturally intelligent; moreover, Walter's words, as well as things he had seen himself at Lane's Castle, had told him a good deal; and now, when Kester rode up to the two strangers, he felt vaguely uneasy, though he could not hear what he said. However, when the two strangers conferred together, and Kester drew aside, Ralph, who had very sharp ears, pushed a little nearer and heard what they said.

"I like not the looks of these men," said the younger man. "If the bridge be indeed broken down as they say, let us return to

Hollingford for the night."

"Tut, Alwyn, the bad weather crossing from Flanders has made you squeamish! Look at yonder lad; a face like his does not grow from a bad stock." And forthwith he accepted Kester's offer to show the way by the ford, and give the travellers shelter for the night at Lane's Castle.

Now Ralph, knowing well from this that Kester had lied about the bridge, scented evil, yet he had no means of warning them, though he trembled when he heard the elder man speak freely to Kester of the treasure in his packs. Kester, to bear out his lying story, led them a long round to a point where the river could be forded; but all the time he kept close to the bridle-rein of the merchant, while one of the men-atarms stuck closely to the servant, and they reached the Castle before Ralph could think of any plan.

But when he had them safely within the walls Kester's vigilance relaxed; no objection was made to their seeing themselves to the bestowing of their horses and goods in the stable, and in the bustle of arrival Ralph was able to join them there unobserved. He was able in a few hasty words to warn them of their danger and tell them of the key in the wall: also that the door in the Castle which led to the courtyard at the back was barred, but not locked.

"God bless you, lad!" said the merchant. "Thanks to your timely warning, we may yet escape this evil man. But we must cloak our fears for the present and wait for nightfall." Then as Ralph was about to slip away he caught him by the arm: "Come with us; this man may vent his wrath on you when he finds his prey has escaped."

"Nay, sir, for I cannot leave my brother,

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lest he slay him in his fury, for I think he fears not God nor man."

The merchant, who had a kind and very thoughtful face, laid his hand on Ralph's head.

"God have you in His keeping," he said, "and should ever a chance to escape arise, remember you have a friend in William Caxton, whose dwelling henceforth, if all goes well, will be at the sign of the 'Red Pale,' Westminster, hard by the City of London."

Ralph gave a gasp. "The man of the New Printing!"

The merchant started.

"How came you to know of such things in

this kennel?" he asked.

"Nay, sir, not here, but in the house of my uncle, Giles Tylott of Norminster, he—"but some one shouted angrily, "Ralph!"

And he was obliged to hurry away.

Ralph, whose own heart beat so loudly that it seemed to him that every one must hear its throbs, wondered greatly at the calmness of the merchant. Not only did he eat his supper leisurely, but he kept up a



RALPH GAVE A GASP.

conversation with Sir Reynard, who questioned him a good deal about Bruges, from whence he had come, saying he had heard it was a marvellous, rich city. He was in high good humour, and so was Kester, and this, even without Walter's gloomy looks, would have made Ralph uneasy, for he knew by this time that it was a sign that they hoped to succeed in their evil plans.

There was a room opening off the hall on the opposite side from Sir Reynard's, and in this the strangers were to sleep. This room had also a door into a narrow corridor, which led to the courtyard at the

rear.

Ralph wished that he had warned the merchant that the best time for attempting escape would be when Sir Reynard and his men were still stupid and sleepy, after their heavy meal and deep drinking. There was no chance of giving the warning now, unless he was able to keep awake until the men had dropped asleep and Sir Reynard had gone to his room. But Ralph was already feeling sleepy from the long ride in the open air; he nodded over his plate,

started, and opened his eyes, only to find a mist creeping up before them again. To his sleepy gaze Sir Reynard looked now as if he had two heads, and the merchant's face got mixed up with Walter's. He fancied he heard a kind voice say, "The boy is tired out," and then some one, he knew not who, laid him down on his bed in the corner of the hall.

"What is it? Oh, spare them!"

Ralph started up, for it seemed to him that the hall was full of noise, and he had been dreaming that Kester was murdering the travellers. It was not yet daylight, but some one held a torch, and by its light he saw that there were only two men standing by the table in the centre of the room; the others were snoring heavily.

Sir Reynard, his face distorted with passion, was raging at Kester, who listened sulkily, waiting for a pause to speak. When he did, Ralph breathed more freely, for he said, "Tis no fault of mine that they have stolen away in this manner, and I wot not how they did it. They must have gone

hastily, for they have forgotten one of their precious boxes."

Sir Reynard's anger cooled a little at that. "A box, say you? Bring it hither at once

that we may examine its contents."

Kester then dragged into the centre of the hall a small but very heavy box, which he prised open by means of the strong knife he had in his belt.

Sir Reynard, holding the torch, peered down eagerly at the contents, then uttered an angry oath.

"What foolery is this? 'Tis full of

nothing but little metal letters."

At that Ralph's curiosity got the better of his fears, and he stole across the hall and stood in the shadow; but Kester seemed to have eyes in the back of his head.

"What do you prying here?" he growled.

"I but wanted to see the letters,"

murmured Ralph.

"Here, look if you will, and then Kester can throw the rubbish away." Ralph needed no second bidding, and kneeling down beside the box, looked for the first time at the wonderful letters that meant so much to him and to the world, but nothing at all to Sir Reynard and Kester.

The box was carefully packed, but one or two of the letters had got loose, and he took one in his hand so that he could see it clearly. It was at one end of a slender shank of some soft metal like lead, about an inch long and an eighth of an inch thick. So busy was he looking at it that he did not see Sir Reynard and Kester exchange meaning glances over his head.

"Now get you gone to your lair!" said Kester, pushing him roughly aside, when it seemed to him he had scarcely looked for a moment; but he dared not disobey, so lay down again.

## CHAPTER IX

#### HOME

"SEE here, Ralph, we must have food and shelter, and yonder bush promises both." So saying Walter pointed to a bush slung on a pole outside a house which announced to the wayfarer that refreshment was to be had within.

Ralph's unwary exclamation on awaking, and his delight at the sight of the famous type his uncle dreamed of, had drawn suspicion on himself of having had some hand in the escape of the travellers. Walter discovered this by some words Sir Reynard and Kester let fall in his hearing while he feigned to be in a heavy sleep, and creeping to Ralph's side in the early dawn he whispered to him that if it was indeed true that he had helped the travellers to escape, they must now get off themselves by the same means.

This they had succeeded in doing, and had now come safely as far as the outskirts of a town that lay about half-way between Lane's Castle and Norminster. At first, in their dread of pursuit, they had been obliged to waste time lurking in thickets and woods, and wandering in miry lanes; and by the time that they could venture to regain the high road they were half starved.

The tavern was one of the poorer sort, and empty except for a couple of smockfrocked countrymen, who were drinking beer at a table near the door, and a man

who sat by himself near the fire.

Walter thrust his hand into his pouch to see what money he had, and as he did so a groat slipped through his fingers and fell on the floor. As he stooped to pick it up the light from the fire fell full on his face. The man sitting near looked keenly at him, then got up quietly and left the room.

"I arrest you in the King's name."

Ralph, who had been half asleep, sprang to his feet to see two men, who looked like constables, grasping Walter by the shoulders. Beside them stood the man who had been at the table near him, and another man in a fur-trimmed gown with a gold chain round his neck.

"This is one of the rascals," said the first man, "who was in the fray the night my brother was murdered at Caswell Bridge."

"But I lifted no hand against him," urged Walter.

"That avails nothing. Your very words

prove you guilty."

"That is true," said the Bailiff, wagging



his head solemnly, "and to-night you shall lodge in the town gaol. There will be a Court on Monday that you will be tried at, and I warrant your shrift will be a short one, for men are weary of all this robbing and murdering."

"Oh, sir," cried Ralph, "surely you will not hang him for what he did not do! We are but now escaping ourselves from Sir Reynard's Castle."

"Tut! tut! Here's another of them!" said the Bailiff. But the other man shook his head. "Nay, this one was not with

them; he can go."

"Ay, go, Ralph, ere it is too late," said Walter, "and leave me to the fate that my folly has earned me."

But Ralph exclaimed desperately, "My uncle Giles Tylott of Norminster will stand

surety for him."

"Are you really kin to Master Tylott, with whom I have had dealings?" the Bailiff asked doubtfully. "Well, if that be so he shall have a week's grace. If you do not come back in that time I shall know there is no truth in your story. And, mark this also," he added, "much as I respect Master Tylott, even his word cannot save a criminal from his just due."

In after years Ralph looked back on the struggle to get to Norminster in time as a horrible nightmare, of which he only remembered clearly falling exhausted by the roadside, and being roused from a sort of faint to find himself in his uncle's arms, and the grave, kind face of William Caxton looking down at him.

In his haste to secure help for Walter he had never even asked his uncle's pardon, but somehow he knew he had it all the same. Tylott was at the moment on his way with a strong party to rescue the lads

from their peril in Lane's Castle.

When Ralph had told his story Caxton said, "I will go straight to London and see the King. It will be easy to see him, for he is deeply interested in this matter of printing, and I will crave from him the boon of this lad's life. I owe his brother already a debt that cannot be easily repaid."

Meanwhile Walter in his prison cell did not even know that Ralph had reached Norminster, and felt his hopes grow fainter every day, for he had been found guilty before the Sheriff's Court and any day now might have to suffer the extreme penalty of the law. One evening as he lay on his straw bed, he heard a great clatter of horses' hoofs on the street outside, as if some one rode in hot haste, and then a great clamour of voices; but he could make out no word.

Presently the door opened, and an old priest, who had been permitted to visit him and had done much to comfort his soul in his present strait, entered.

"Is my time come, Father?" asked

Walter, rising on his elbow.

"Nay, my son, God grant that you will have time now to grow into a noble knight. The King's messenger has come, and he brings a pardon."

## "Welcome home!"

This time the words rang in Walter's ears as well as Ralph's, and he, no less than his young brother, had learnt their value.

In the first fervour of his gratitude to Caxton and Tylott for saving his life, Walter prayed to be bound apprentice to the latter, but Tylott refused his request.

"You can work for me," he said, "if

you will, but I doubt you were not born to be a craftsman."

Ralph's submission, on the other hand, he accepted readily, saying, "Have but patience, lad, and your eye and brain will take you far."

So it came about that for three years Walter served Giles Tylott as an unskilled workman, and at the end of that time, thanks to Caxton's influence with the King, the Manor of Ditchley was restored to him. Ralph also went bravely through his apprenticeship, and though Wat was always a trial because of his spiteful temper, and Dickon also was seldom friendly, he made many friends amongst the apprentices as well as Hal and Job. He loved to serve his uncle, and later learned to love serving Norminster too, becoming in time one of its most distinguished citizens.

With Cicely he was always her dear brother Ralph, but Walter she came to love with a different kind of love. So it was that once again there was a Dame Cicely at Ditchley Manor, for Walter, though he was not clever, managed his little estate uprightly and well, and attained in time to the dignity of knighthood.

So the brothers prospered, and each in his own way served God and his

neighbour faithfully.

Their positions and their duties were different; but none might say which was the truer gentleman—he who bore the knight's surcoat, or he who wore the trader's gown.



